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# THE HOPE OF THE WORLD<sup>1</sup>

BY CHARLES H. A. WAGER

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PRESIDENT WILSON said finely, in his Red Cross speech at New York: "The first duty is to win the war. The second is to win it greatly and worthily."

In our perception of the first duty, which grows clearer every day, we are perhaps not thinking so earnestly as we ought of the second. For it is indeed important that the means to our end should be as noble, as unimpeachable, as the end itself. To make the world safe for democracy, with all that it implies, is an object worth fighting for to the uttermost, and beyond; but suppose democracy, when it is secured, should prove to be, in aim, a vulgar materialism, in practice, the rule of the second-rate. Nobody but the doctrinaire will deny that this is possible. The word is equivocal. Russia has taught us that it may have sinister implications. Neither France nor the United States has convinced us that it is a synonym for the Kingdom of Heaven. After all, democracy, too, is a means, not an end; the end is life itself, the life of the individual, of the nation, of the world; a life that has height and depth as well as breadth, fineness as well as force, and vision as well as effectiveness. Life in this great sense—civilization is a better name for it—must be attained, if attained at all, greatly. We may not assume that it is to be won by any instruments that come to hand; it is not a mechanical product, but an organism, and the forces that create it must be a part of it and share its nature.

We believe that out of the travail and the agony through which the world is passing, a new civilization is to be born.

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<sup>1</sup>Many of the illustrative instances in this paper are taken from M. Maurice Barrès' admirable articles in the *Echo de Paris*, reprinted in the six volumes of *L'Âme Française et la Guerre*. I have drawn also upon his *Diverses Familles Spirituelles de la France*, and upon *Impressions de Guerre de Prêtres Soldats* of M. Léonce de Grandmaison.

Upon this belief we are all staying our souls. Were it not for this, the anguish of the present, the terror of the future, would be literally unendurable. But the nature of that new civilization, despite the facile prophets who beset us with their certainties, is hidden in the counsels of God. How, we incessantly ask ourselves, can we anticipate it? What assurance have we that it will be something better than we have known or dreamed?

The answer to these questions depends upon the relation of the means to the end, of which I have spoken. The end we cannot foresee nor directly control. The means are before us; we can, in a measure, modify them; in them are the promise and potency of the future. Now the means, the instruments, of this vast renovation, this new civilization for which we long, are our armies, the radiant young men, in this and other lands, who hourly turn their backs on all that men love and prize, to fight the good fight. They are the hope of the world. Upon them, upon their spirit, upon the experiences they undergo, upon the lessons they learn, depends the future of civilization. What they learn, we shall learn; what they intend, we shall perform. They are creating the future. *They are the future.* The precise outcome of their labors we cannot foretell; but its character may be read in what they shall learn and accomplish during these prophetic years. The young soldiers that we are daily sending overseas, whom we follow with such exalted pride, with such ineffable tenderness—to what do they go? How, if they return to us, will they return? What incalculable spiritual fortune awaits them over there? What is this new life that they will bring back to us in their heroic hands?

To these questions I believe it is possible to give an answer, an answer that is not derived from our wishes or our hopes, but from the experiences of another army, older than ours, though not old, and already immortal in glory, the heroic army of France. These experiences are recorded in what is even now a literature of great extent and high quality,—in verse, in fiction, in newspaper articles, in military reports, in private letters. It is because of the extent and value of this literature that we are able to know so much more intimately the mind of the French soldier than that of any other soldier in the field. There is plenty of evidence that both the British and the Italian armies are undergoing much the same mental experiences as the French, just as they are

performing the same marvels of daring and steadfastness, but the incomparable genius of the French for analysis and expression gives to the record of what they are doing and suffering a quite unique importance. In this record I read the prophecy of what our men, too, will undergo, the sublime virtues that they will acquire, the new life that they will bring back to us. And, I repeat that what they learn, we too shall learn. They are the future. They and their fellows of France, of Italy, of England are the hope of the world.

It is inconceivable that we should think of them as mere agents for the attainment of our military ends. The armies of a democracy are not of that kind. To hold such a view would be to accept the very theory of militarism that we are sworn to sweep from the face of the earth. It would be grotesque to think of our army so—a possible five millions of young and vigorous men, the physical hope of the nation! No, behind every gun and bayonet and bomb there is a mind that must build as well as a hand that must destroy. When all is over, the work of reconstruction must be performed not only in the ruined villages and devastated fields of France and Belgium and Italy: it must be wrought in the legislatures and markets, the homes and churches of every belligerent nation, and, not least, our own. And this work must be done by our armies, and by us under their inspiration. What an incalculable loss and danger if they do not learn the mighty lessons of camp and trench! What radiant hope for the future, if they do! This is why the spectacle of France and England and Italy at this moment is so thrilling. The fabric of the new civilization is being woven before our eyes.

I have no wish to minimize the horror and irrationality of war, nor to gild it with a spurious glory. I am seeking a soul of goodness in the evil thing, which may in some measure compensate for its appalling waste and anguish. If we may believe, on certain evidence, that our men, besides doing the stern, inevitable duty of the hour, are learning some of the most significant lessons that men can learn; if they are not merely cogs in a great machine of destruction, but thinking cogs, thinking to a beneficent purpose: then, surely, in the hearts of those who love them and reverence them and pray for their safety, the thought of what they must undergo becomes more endurable. To such consolation I believe that the recorded experiences of France give us an indubitable

right. Every foreign mail brings to us some illuminating document in which her most accomplished men of letters reveal to us the soul of France, and especially the spirit of her army. We are not compelled to interpret her deeds for ourselves. Those who best know by what motives she is actuated interpret them for us. On such testimony we may securely rest our hopes and expectations for the future. Our men are not dull. As they may be trusted to do their duty as soldiers, so they may be trusted to learn whatever war has to teach.

What, for example, may we expect them to learn from the mere discipline of arms, the soldierly endurance of hardship? Let us consider what an actual French boy learned from it.

His experience is recorded in a book, part of a priceless legacy left us by a young French officer who fell on the field of honor in the first days of the war. Though it professes to be fiction, it is really autobiography—a study at first hand of what another great Frenchman has called the servitude and the grandeur of military life. It is called *The Appeal of Arms*, and its author is Ernest Psichari. The hero of it, brought up, like an American boy of the present day, in an atmosphere of science, of humanitarianism, of vague internationalism, is required to perform his military service. He has been trained in the notion that the army is an anachronism, and that the ordinary soldier is, in mind and habits, hardly a social being; that he is, in fact, a survival from a barbaric age. It is not so long ago that such a notion was the prevalent one among us. Our young Frenchman—remember that this is actual experience—finds that the servitude of military life, with all its hardships and drudgery and subjection and even brutality, is a school of morals, of rudimentary morals, if you like, but morals nevertheless. He learns to obey those who have a right to command him. He learns to endure what must be endured, without question or complaint. He even comes to take pride in the manly austerity of his life and in being a part of a great machine, functioning smoothly in his place, and contributing his necessary share to the total result. He rejoices in what is called his “ascetic anonymity.”

Does this account merely confirm the long-prevalent conception of the army as an anachronism, a fragment from the feudal rubbish-heap? I have to confess that these qualities

of obedience and endurance and self-effacement are neither modern, nor, in the current sense, democratic; but I am persuaded that until democracy learns them, it is not safe for the world. Moreover, I am Carlylian enough to believe that the hero-worship of the army, the unquestioning, personal devotion of the young soldier to his officers, is another quality that democracy must acquire, if it is to be saved from its cult of mediocrity; and this, too, our young Frenchman learns. That "sweet and sudden passion of youth towards greatness in its elder," that "instant reverence, dearer to true young hearts than their own praise"—we have all heard our young soldiers express it, and we have all envied them their noble enthusiasm. The recorded testimony of French and English soldiers for their officers fallen in battle is full of it. They are praised and lamented with an emotion that many a father in the flesh has neither won nor deserved. To be stirred by a high and saving passion like this—is it not to have a new glory added to life, a new motive for well-doing?

Day by day, under the severities of discipline, a new man was forming silently and unconsciously in our young soldier; his soul was becoming "simple, unified, elemental." The narrative ends with these words: "To be the slave of one's idea is not given to everybody. The servitude of the army exists, as the servitude of the priest exists and the servitude of the thinker. But in all the world, only these slaves are free."

There is the point. Like the priest and the thinker, the young soldier is, consciously or unconsciously, the slave of an idea. First from observation and then from experience, he learns that "the invisible leads the world." He is fighting for a cause. He undergoes these incredible dangers and hardships for an idea. Will he be quite so ready, when he comes back to us, to fall in with our practical materialism? Having offered his life daily for an intangibility, is he likely to devote the remainder of it wholly to "the god of things as they are"? Even the so-called fatalism of the soldier, his carelessness about death, which figures so largely in our matter-bounded thoughts, what does it mean except that he places something higher than physical good, though it be but a manly sense of honor, or even the fear of fear? We look at the careless boys that throng our streets and fill our camps, and we say to ourselves: "I wonder how many of them are consciously ready to die for an idea?" Not all of them, to

be sure; but to be unconsciously ready to die, if need be, at the command of another, to be so girded up to duty and honor, is hardly inferior to conscious and deliberate heroism. How can we know what thoughts possess them? They are inarticulate. How can we know what miracles may be wrought in them by the contagion of example?

Only the other day a newspaper printed a letter from one of our new soldiers now in France, of which this is a portion: "You will well remember that last year I was none too anxious that our boys get into this scrap. You will well remember that I was still reticent about making any sacrifice until last autumn. You know how easy it is to take things as they come, when we don't have to sacrifice much; how easy it is to let the other fellow do it. I will make a frank confession, that I don't believe I ever knew what it meant to be *patriotic*."

Well, he knows now, that ingenuous lad, and he will know as long as he lives. There are thousands far less promising than he, the "off-scourings," as we graphically call them, of our cities; and we lament that our clean and honest boys must be brought into the intimate contact with them that camp and trench involve. Are we to assume that these derelicts of life are impervious to ideas? It is unsafe. Several battalions of them were recruited for the French army from the penal colonies of Africa, and the blood that they poured out before Arras could not be distinguished from the blood of their betters. One of them wrote to a nurse who had been kind to him in hospital: "The time drags until I can return to the front, to kill as many as possible, and to die if I must. I have given my life to France, I, a poor outcast, I, a vagabond! . . . I have committed follies and I am sorry, but the mischief is done. I often think that if I had known you, I should not have gone so deep into the mud. . . ."

A lad of eighteen, who had been brought up in a founding hospital of Paris, without friends or education, was chosen to reconnoitre a German trench. He had already been wounded in such an expedition, and he believed this to be his last, as, indeed, it proved. The little daughter of his commanding officer had sent him an Easter gift, with a friendly word, and when he departed on his dangerous mission, he left a letter for her father containing the child's note, his only possession of value. His letter runs as follows:

To be given to Commandant P. if I do not return by six o'clock Wednesday morning.

My Commandant :

Having a mission, small, it is true, but rather dangerous, the lieutenant has done me the honor to send me on it. I go, therefore, gladly, since it is my job, rather than any one else's. But as I may remain there, I thank you, as well as Miss Y. for having been so thoughtful as to send me an Easter remembrance. So, my Commandant, permit me to thank you. Forward! Long live France! If you receive this card, it will be because I have fallen for good. Forward all the same!

At the next roll-call of his company, his name was called very loud, and someone answered for him, "Dead on the field of honor." And M. Maurice Barrès, who records the incident, thus comments upon it: "There are multitudes of lives of this sort that are creating the spirituality, the moral world, of which we are the beneficiaries. This child, brought up by public charity, is found to be a prince and our superior." In such lives there are, of course, many moments in which there is nothing of heroism. Indeed, the general texture of them is doubtless commonplace enough. But these are their heroic hours, and by *them* they must be judged.

We must not forget that such examples are contagious. "None of us liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself," we are told, the soldier least of all. He acts upon a great stage, with the eyes of the world upon him, and especially the eyes of his fellows. It is impossible to exaggerate the effect of such an experience, prolonged day after day for months, upon the minds of those who take part in it. They may talk of such actions lightly, as mere incidents of war, but we are not to be deceived by their flippancy. To be *accustomed* to heroism, to have learned to take it for granted—what may we not expect of men who have formed such a habit? When all allowance has been made for the deadening effect of custom, is it not certain that life will seem a more sacred thing to men with such memories—not life in the physical sense, perhaps, but life in the higher and truer sense in which we must come to think of it? The records abound in illustrations; the difficulty is to choose. The young lieutenant, Guy de Cassagnac, chosen by his captain to lead his company to certain death, and apologizing to his fellow officers for monopolizing an honor that they all desired to share! The young Captain Madelin, carried back to the lines, mor-



tally wounded and in great agony, exclaiming, "I am happy to suffer for France!" The young poet, Paul Drouot, frail, delicate, distinguished, rushing forth in a hurricane of shells to bring in his wounded chief, and falling himself within a few hours! They are all alike, these young demigods, officers and men, "representatives of a splendid generation." Burke was wrong when he said, a hundred years ago, that the age of chivalry was gone. The age of chivalry is *not* gone when such deeds are possible, and they are as natural to American soldiers as to French. We read in our newspapers every morning the beginnings of our roll of honor. Cantigny! Chateau-Thierry! The very names are like the sound of trumpets. Yes, our men will do what other men have done, and they will bring back to us memories and patterns of sacrificial valor that should redeem our national life from triviality forever.

These hours of heroism, moreover, are hours of union, of fraternity. To have lived through such experiences together is to have forged a bond that will resist most of the strains of life. Men who have faced these horrors—nay, who have rushed to meet them—swept away by a common ardor; who have vied with one another in daring; who have succored one another at the peril of their lives; who have followed, as one man, the voice of their chief; who have thrilled at the splendid heroisms of their fellows, and who have wept over them fallen—such men it will take more than intellectual or political or religious differences to divide. It is already a commonplace of the newspapers that faction-ridden France has become one people. "The friendship of the trenches" has become proverbial. Clericals and anti-clericals, Christians and Jews and militant atheists, monarchists and republicans and socialists, inveterate enemies of a generation ago, are finding themselves to be of one heart and soul, and all but of one mind. Upon this division their enemies counted. They did not count upon a miracle: the resurrection, the regeneration of France. "In these charnel houses," writes a soldier, "a new France is forming. Those who return will know what constitutes a true national life. They will always take a higher point of view than the partisan. Grouped behind their glorious leaders, bound together in such a brotherhood, they cannot be torn apart. They will no longer be able to misconceive the laws of life, the needs of the public weal. And what authority each of them will have! A sergeant, in the

depths of his muddy trench, is gaining a better right to be heard in his village to the day of his death than the most eloquent of our present leaders."

We have not known in America, at least in recent years, anything like the deep-seated rancor of party that has rent the soul of France. But signs are not wanting that this is possible even among us. The class hatreds that spring out of industrialism, the racial misunderstandings that inhere in such a population as ours, all show the need of a healing and cementing principle. Shoulder to shoulder, men of every class and nationality and creed and color stand in the trenches—shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart. May we not expect that the miracle of France will be repeated, that the misery of France will be averted from us? Will not the "unforgettable hours of the battlefield" unite us, make us one people, as nothing else could have done?

But the unifying and reconciling possibilities of the battlefield are wider than this; they should create a new internationalism, based on something more solid than theory—on a common inspiration and ideal, on the brotherhood of danger and suffering. This is suggested by the superb telegram that the Italian patriot and poet D'Annunzio sent to Maurice Barrès on the day that Italy threw in her lot with the Allies: "We had two fatherlands, and to-night we have but one, which stretches from French Flanders to the Sicilian Sea. It is poetry that gives this real and marvelous gift to our militant friendship." Poetry! which is only another word for ideals, aspirations. This it is that made Britons and Americans one people, despite their superficial disagreements, long before the war. We spoke a common tongue, the tongue of Shakespeare. We were nourished by the same high, spiritual food. It was inevitable that in all the deepest decisions of life we should be of one mind. For that is what poetry is; it is potential action, and noble action is effective poetry. And now we are brought into contact with two other great nations. We join hands with them, in the persons of our bravest and most generous, in the defence of undying things. Shall we ever again know what intellectual isolation means?

There is a deeper lesson to learn on the battlefields of France, the deepest, the most necessary of all. Unless it is learned, there is no real hope for the world. I mean the lesson of religion. Not religion in the sense in which many

of the leaders of modern thought are accustomed to use the word, not religion in the sense of humanitarianism, or of thinly veiled pantheism, or of philosophic rationalism; not a religion whose conception of "the spiritual combat" is a series of strategic retreats before the advancing hosts of science, a religion that holds as of the Faith only what is conceded to it by the dominant intellectualism of the hour. France has long professed this simulacrum of religion, so far as she has professed any. The creed of her men of light and leading was formulated half a century ago by Gaston Paris, one of her foremost scholars: "I profess this doctrine, absolutely and without reservation, that science has no other end than the truth, and the truth for its own sake, without reference to the consequences, good or bad, regrettable or fortunate, that may be practically involved in it. So understood, common research, pursued in the same spirit in all civilized lands, is forming above our limited nationalities, different as they are, and too often hostile to one another, a great fatherland, which no war stains and which no conqueror threatens and in which souls are finding the refuge and the unity that the City of God gave them in other times." These famous and noble words were uttered while the Germans were besieging Paris in 1870. How far, in fifty years, have we advanced towards that peaceful fatherland of science?

A year ago, on the eve of our entrance into the war, one of the most typical and trusted leaders of American thought, President Eliot, committed himself to a similar position. After quoting Herbert Spencer's dictum that science is the subject best worth knowing, he continues: "The present war has demonstrated its truth to thinking men in Europe and America. It now appears that science is the knowledge best worth having not only for its direct effects in promoting the material welfare of mankind, but also for its power to strengthen the moral purposes of mankind, and make possible a secure civilization founded on justice, the sanctity of contracts, and goodwill." I must not comment on this amazing assumption further than to remind you that the nation that has violated Belgium, devastated France, and all but exterminated the Armenian people is the nation that, more than any other in the modern world, has proclaimed the supremacy of that science which is "to make possible a secure civilization founded on justice, the sanctity of contracts, and goodwill."

It was a Frenchman, and a profoundly typical Frenchman, who uttered the saving words—words that come as near as human speech can come to illuminating the darkness that shuts us in: “The heart has its reasons that the reason does not know”—“reasons,” mark you, not emotions. In Pascal, scientist and mystic, the two sides of the French nature are united and harmonized, and the best minds among her young soldiers are—to borrow a word from her literary criticism—“Pascalizing.” They are abandoning the false and defective teaching of the day, and returning to their ancient Faith—or, as one of them has phrased it, each “is taking part with his fathers against his father.” It is not the fear of death that has wrought this miracle. These young men do not fear death. It is not only love of France raised to sublime and sacrificial heights. In the face of the darkness that encompasses them, the awful enigma of a universe in which such things can be, they return, like helpless children, to the only teaching that even professes to explain the mystery that surrounds our life. It is not a religion of good works that can help them now, though the battlefields of France are starred all over with deeds of divine charity. It is not the specious simplifications of a so-called rational religion that will give them courage and faith and invincible hope. It is that religion of mystery and awe, that devout prostration of the soul before the Unseen, which girds them for the supreme trial. It is more than this, of course. It is a childlike dependence upon familiar and consoling words; upon hallowed and comforting rites. This it is that fills the immense void in their souls and saves them from despair. The vision of Constantine is being renewed on the plains of Flanders and Picardy and in the mountains of the Vosges: “With this sign thou shalt conquer.” A new Christian apologetic—new to us, but as old as the Faith—is being written, an apologetic based on one of those profound assumptions that underlie all religion, that the conviction which responds to the deepest and most imperative need of man is true. Led by such reasons of the heart, many of the best minds of France are regaining their religious heritage. It is no uncommon thing to read in their letters that they think of themselves as expiating the sins of their generation. “The more I suffer,” writes one, “the more others will be happy. I believe in the communion of the living. That is why I love suffering.”

And the rank and file, the unthinking, the uninstructed,

what of them? Are they only gay, reckless children, with no thought beyond the moment? A soldier-priest saying Mass at the front, before a congregation of men who had long neglected their religious duties, said to them: "You do not know the prayers, but there is a way of praying that pleases God and that is within your power. God is honored by song. Find something that you all know—it doesn't matter what—and sing it when I elevate the Host." They whispered among themselves, and at the solemn moment of the Elevation they broke out together in the stanza of the *Marseillaise* that begins, "*Amour sacré de la Patrie*—Sacred love of fatherland."

Two great realities, which yet are but one reality, love of country and love of God! No internationalism, however lofty, will destroy that relation. These men are learning, wise and simple alike, that the defence of all that they hold dear implies religion, that it is impossible to leave out of account, in estimating the priceless treasures for which they are glad to die, the heritage of the Christian Faith.

But Americans are not Frenchmen, someone reminds me, and religion, in the sense of the word that I employ, is not a part of their inheritance. They belong to a hard-headed, positive, aggressive race, absorbed in the affairs of this real and tangible world; imaginative and idealistic in certain directions, but very little concerned with what they cannot see and handle. This is no doubt true, but such a temperament is no greater obstacle to the appeal of religion than the temperament of the French—rational, incredulous, insistent upon reality. It is perhaps an obstacle to the appeal of a certain type of religion, but not to the appeal of religion itself. Like the French, they may perceive, in the spiritual illumination wrought by heroism and suffering and the imminent presence of death, that reality is not exhausted by the visible and the tangible; that, in truth, they have left the Supreme Reality of all out of their calculations; that the invisible does indeed lead the world. It is because we have acquired the habit of expecting mediocrity that we are so ready to assume that our young men will not grow to the stature of the cause which they are defending, that their eyes will be closed and their ears sealed to the profoundest teaching of the war. There are thousands, at any rate, who will learn this lesson, as their spiritual kinsmen of France and England are learning it. If they do not, the new world to

which we look forward, however defended by international regulation, and however ennobled by humanitarian zeal, will be a world deprived of the highest incentive to peace and brotherhood that man can know.

These are the lessons that we may expect our young armies to learn, lessons of discipline, of idealism, of self-sacrifice, of fraternity, of religion. If they—if all the fighting peoples—learn them, what may we not hope for the future?

“If the blood of France is saved, we shall rebuild our cathedrals,” cried Maurice Barrès, on the day after the destruction of Rheims. “No,” replied an artist, “we do not know how to make such buildings any more.” “Granted,” said M. Barrès, “that our sons do not know how to erect the two towers, the holy portal, and the populace of images; but they equal our ancestors when they fashion a series of heroic actions, unified, composed, coördinated, full of soul, dedicated to the highest powers. This war of deliverance is a cathedral, built by the whole nation, a high house of sacrifice and triumph, where future generations shall never cease to come in spirit and to kneel.”

Such a house for the spirit of man we, too, may hope to raise by the efforts of our sons, taught by the stern discipline of war in a righteous cause. Such a temple of freedom we, too, are helping to build—one people, united in one lofty purpose, sobered and disciplined by sacrifice, lifted above self-seeking, our spirits touched to immortal issues; and in the shadow of that temple the nations shall work the works of peace. The very expectation of it should half console us for the price that we must pay. Thousands of these lads of ours, who are our hope, will fall before they see the glorious fabric into which they have built their lives. They will be not only those who die with the eyes of men upon them, and the praise of men in their ears, but the unknown, the nameless, whose heroism no man sees. They are all deathless, for they are all included in the benediction of that son of France, himself a hero and martyr, who cried: “Happy they who die for the natal earth, in a just war, for they are the body of the City of God.”

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